Transforming the Task Force Scout Platoon

by Captain Ryan Seagreaves

Reconnaissance operations have become even more important under the Force XXI redesign of battalions from four maneuver companies to three. Additionally, over the past 2 decades, the U.S. Army has changed its task force scout platoon vehicle from the Bradley Cavalry Fighting Vehicle to the M1025/6 high-mobility multipurpose, wheeled vehicle (HMMWV). Neither platform was designed with reconnaissance solely in mind, and each has critical limitations in executing recon missions.

For years, discussion has raged over creating, or purchasing, and fielding a true reconnaissance/cavalry vehicle for task force scout platoons. Selecting the Stryker as the interim force platform led me to wonder, what if that (or something similar) was my vehicle to fight from as a scout? Could it solve dilemmas when I lacked the capabilities to solve them? The conclusion I came to was a resounding "yes," the critical limitations of the Task Force (TF) HMMWV Scout Platoon can be corrected by a transformation to the light armored vehicle (LAV)-25 reconnaissance vehicle, the Coyote.

Limitations of the HMMWV Scout Platoon

The current M1025/6 HMMWV-equipped task force scout platoon lacks capabilities in five areas that hinder mission accomplishment — optics, survivability, dismounted capability, casualty evacuation (CASEVAC), and lethality.

Optics. First and foremost among these deficiencies is the lack of quality optics equipment to improve target acquisition and identification. The Long Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System (LRAS3) could solve this problem, however, the majority of scouts in Legacy Force-equipped units have never seen this piece of equipment, as it has only been fielded in the 4th Infantry Division.[1] Currently, most scouts use binoculars that have 7-power magnification, and for night sights they use AN/PVS-7D, AN/PVS-4, AN/TVS-5, and the AN/TAS-4B. Of the four night-vision systems, the AN/PVS-7D delivers reliability and a clear image but is only effective from 250 to 300 meters. The PVS-4 and TVS-5 are less reliable but give the user a slightly better range for acquisition. Only the AN/TAS-4B — basically the old TOW sight — provides effective target identification greater than 500 meters. The AN/TAS-4B is limited in its acquisition, however, to about 1500 meters. Essentially, we force the scout to maneuver closer to the enemy to accomplish his mission — inside the enemy's direct-fire range.

Survivability. The second serious limitation is a platform with no survivability. Most of today's scouts are still equipped with the M1025/6 models, and not the up-armored HMMWVs that are slowly being fielded to military police units. The M1025/6 models will not provide protection for even 5.56mm fire. Now the scout is forced inside direct-fire range of the enemy in a vehicle with no survivability.

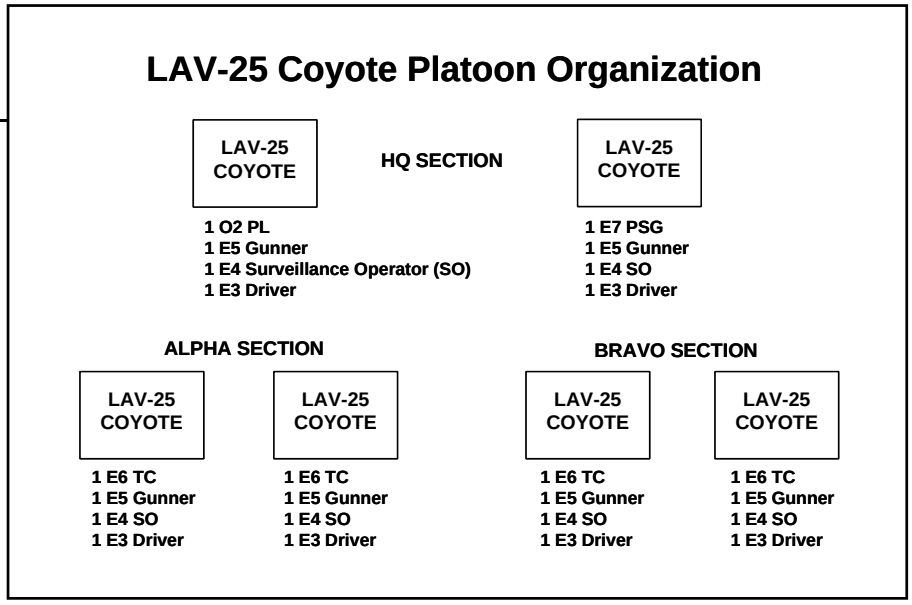
Dismounted Capability. No problem, you say. The scout should be conduct-

ing recon missions using the oldest and best method — dismounted. This overcomes our optics' deficiencies and the problem of limited vehicle survivability. The problem, however, is simple and stated best in U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 17-98, *Scout Platoon*, "The HMMWV scout platoon has very limited dismounted capability; it must be carefully task organized to conduct dismounted operations."[2] Any scout can tell stories of complex task organization schemes worked out and placed in a scout platoon SOP that lives and dies on paper. The bottom line is the scout platoon's dismounted capability is limited to manning a two-man, long duration observation point (OP), or to conducting a local area reconnaissance by each section. Anything more manpower intensive causes the platoon to operate outside the normal SOP, which is more than likely beyond the platoon's capabilities. When one considers the Force XXI redesign that reduces the platoon to six vehicles, the dismounted capability is even further diminished.

Lethality. Primarily equipped with "area target" weapons, such as the MK19 40mm machine gun and the M2 .50 caliber machine gun, even the scouts' best gunners are hard pressed to achieve suppressive fire quick enough to support them if they have to break contact — no stabilization, no laser rangefinder. This is a critical need, because help is more than likely far away in the form of indirect fire or another, more lethal, maneuver force.

Casualty Evacuation. CASEVAC remains an issue for scouts operating forward of the task force main body. Often, the CASEVAC plan for the scout platoon is paid lip service during the military decisionmaking process in an effort to deploy the scouts and achieve "eyes downrange" as quickly as possible. The thinking enemy knows that U.S. forces will not leave their wounded and dead on the battlefield, thus creating an opportunity for the enemy to ambush U.S. forces coming to the aid of the scouts. Scout platoon leaders face a dilemma if they attempt to evacuate those casualties because they are in serious risk of becoming casualties themselves and of jeopardizing mission accomplishment.

As a result of the CASEVAC problem, the "rescue team method" is born — a platoon equipped with an M1 (or an M2) and an M113 ambulance on standby with the "be-prepared-to" mission of performing scout CASEVAC. This team has the survivability and lethality to fight through to the casualties and evacuate them. There are multiple problems with this, however, and all revolve around the fact that it will take a *long* time. This rescue team may have to perform its own passage of lines, and may have to navigate to the scouts (probably at night, or be guided by another scout, which takes him away from his mission), thus placing the task force commander in a situation where he may be using 1/9th of his combat power to evacuate scouts. The entire scenario is based on a situation where there is only one site to evacuate casualties. Consider a determined enemy that causes 50 percent casualties in one scout platoon! The problem becomes infinitely greater. The bottom line is scouts need help in performing medical evacuation, and there is no easy solution to the problem with the assets available to the task force.



LAV-25 (Reconnaissance) Coyote

For soldiers with the mission of answering the commander's priority intelligence requirements, we have ill-equipped them with a vehicle that has no survivability, optics that cannot acquire or identify anything at night outside the enemy's direct-fire range, and weapons that will help him break contact successfully only if the enemy fails at attrition. If scouts are forced to operate dismounted, we task organize them with severely limited dismounted capabilities. Scouts are a critical asset and should be equipped for success, and consequently, to accomplish the task force mission.

In an effort to correct these deficiencies, transforming to the TF Scout Platoon, based around General Motors Defense, LAV-25 (Reconnaissance) Coyote, offers an affordable, completed, and readily available platform built by the same company that produces the Stryker platforms. The Canadian army has already fielded more than 150 Coyotes throughout their mounted forces, and has had much success with Coyote-equipped units participating in NTC rotations with U.S. forces.

The Coyote variant of the LAV-25 overcomes many of the shortcomings of the HMMWV-mounted scout platoon. A sample platoon organization is shown above.

Optics. The Coyote offers an extensive sensor suite, which would increase the current scout's target acquisition and identification capabilities by tenfold. The first of these is a long-range television camera with high performance forward-looking infrared that is capable of all-weather day or night target acquisition out to 12 to 15km, and identification out to 8 to 10km.[3] An eye-safe laser rangefinder linked to the vehicle's global positioning system can provide 10 digit grids to targets out to 10km. Additionally, a Doppler ground surveillance radar can detect moving targets out to 24km, and identify targets at 8 to 10km. These three systems can be employed in two ways: in the brigade kit where they are mounted on a hydraulic-powered 7m mast; or in the battle group kit where they are mounted on two tripods. Both systems can be employed remotely up to 200m away. On the turret, the optics include up to a 7.5-power daylight and thermal magnification with laser rangefinder.

Survivability. The Coyote provides protection against small arms, and with

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the same add-on armor package applied to the Stryker, it can provide protection against 14.5mm fire across the frontal arc.

Dismounted Capability. Four-man Coyote crews can conduct two-man dismounted operations, allowing two crewmen to remain behind, thus preventing a lone scout, which is always a problem for HMMWV scouts. The Canadian army prefers to keep the integrity of a section and execute three-man dismounted patrols.[4]

Lethality. The Coyote mounts the Bushmaster 25mm cannon with a coaxial 7.62mm machine gun on a fully stabilized turret, as well as another 7.62mm machine gun on the commander's cupola. Equipped with daylight and thermal optics and a laser rangefinder, the Coyote offers the scout a much superior weapons system to enable him to accomplish the mission. This is not to say that the scout mounted on the Coyote platform should be aggressively engaging the enemy; on the contrary, the scout should follow the adage, "Cross LD with a full magazine and an empty notebook and return with a full magazine and a full notebook." Breaking contact with the enemy if you have been compromised is much easier if you destroy him and reposition unopposed rather than engaging with suppressive fire and breaking contact by fire and movement.

Casualty Evacuation. The capabilities that the Coyote adds to the scout platoon also alleviate the burden on the task force assets to perform CASEVAC for the scouts. The Coyote has the additional survivability and "point target" weapons systems to fight through the hypothetical situation addressed above by the rescue team method. Although definitely a nonstandard CASEVAC platform, the Coyote can at least offer protection from small-arms fire.

Admittedly, there are disadvantages to the LAV-25 Coyote. The "stealth" capability in our current HMMWV scout platoons would be negated in a transition to the Coyote, which has a much larger profile and a height of over 8 feet, as well as a significantly louder noise signature. Secondly, the logistical burden on the task force is also increased in class III, V, and IX. Lastly, the sensor suite, a major advantage of the Coyote, requires extensive effort and significant time to collapse, should the scout have to break contact and reposition. I argue that these disadvantages, however, are outweighed significantly by the Coyote's capabilities.

Information dominance, a recently coined doctrinal term, is making its way through the Army in discussions about transformation. While focused on the Interim and Objective Forces, we cannot simply ignore information dominance in the Legacy Force, since it will be a major part of our Army for the next 2 decades. We continue to stress how important reconnaissance is to the mounted force, and the problems we have with the means to conduct those missions. The Coyote possesses the technical capabilities to solve these problems, and give our Legacy Force the tools to make information dominance a reality for units throughout the next 20 years.

Notes

[1]CPT Sean Fisher, a small group instructor at the Armor Captains Career Course, reminded me of the LRAS3 and its limited fielding among current units.

[2]U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 17-98, *Scout Platoon*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, April 1999, pp. 1-12.

[3]"The Canadian Coyote Reconnaissance Vehicle," *Center for Army Lessons Learned Newsletter, No. 98-24,* Center for Army Lessons Learned, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth, KS. I used the ranges for acquisition and identification from this newsletter of actual Coyote use at the NTC, rather than the figures advertised in Jane's *Armour and Artillery.*

[4]Ibid. This article gave me ideas on how to solve the dismounted capability problem, as I was originally hoping the vehicle would support carrying an additional two personnel to be dedicated dismounted scouts.

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